

Testimony

House Bill 1048

Wednesday, January 19, 2005; 10 a.m.

North Dakota Department of Health

Good morning, Chairman Kelsch and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Terry Dwelle, and I am State Health Officer for the North Dakota Department of Health. I am here today to testify in opposition to House Bill 1048 and to ask for a “do not pass” recommendation from this committee.

House Bill 1048 would decrease the units of health and physical education required to be offered to high school students in North Dakota. As State Health Officer and a practicing pediatrician, I strongly believe this is a step in the wrong direction. We should be emphasizing physical activity, especially in schools where our young people spend significant time.

Studies have shown that being overweight and obese is epidemic in the United States and in North Dakota and, in fact, is rising among children and adolescents, as well. The percentage of high school seniors in North Dakota who are overweight increased from 6 percent in 1999 to 10 percent in 2003. Being overweight or obese is a major risk factor in the development of heart disease and diabetes.

While the number of people who are overweight or obese has been increasing, physical activity and physical education in schools has been decreasing. The percentage of high school students participating in physical education dropped from 64 percent in 1992 to 52 percent in 2003. In addition, 70 percent of high school freshmen report being enrolled in physical education classes, compared to only 39 percent of seniors.

We know that to effectively change high-risk behavior, three things are needed: policies, such as requiring physical education to be offered; supportive infrastructures; and community empowerment and engagement.

In a nutshell, the way to prevent being overweight and obese is clear: increase the amount of physical activity and decrease the caloric intake. As a society, we are sedentary and are becoming more so in this era of computers, video games and television. That’s why it is more important than ever to promote physical activity for our young people.

We're all familiar with "No Child Left Behind." I recently saw a button that underlines the importance of physical activity. It read: "No Child Left on Their Behind." It's vital that we focus on developing not only our students' minds, but also their bodies.

Preserving the legislation passed in 2003 that asks schools to offer physical education every year throughout high school helps to create a supportive infrastructure for North Dakota's children so that they can learn to assimilate regular physical activity into their everyday lives.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.